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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9398

INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 2094

RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 0183

RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0193

RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 0674

RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0482

RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 0190

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0349

RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC PRIORITY

RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEAAIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2489

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1875

RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE PRIORITY

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000435

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/19/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM KG

SUBJECT: DOWNBEAT INSIDER DOUBTS EASY RESOLUTION

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Classified By: Ambassador Marie L. Yovanovitch, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: SCA DAS Evan Feigenbaum met April 17 with MP Omurbek Babanov, who was skeptical about President Bakiyev's ability to settle the current political standoff and predicted that north-south divisions could be exacerbated as a result. Babanov was more confident in PM Almaz Atambayev's ability to broker a compromise, but he still believed that further provocations were likely -- due to Bakiyev's interactions with criminal elements and his penchant for the use of force. Babanov insisted that constitutional reforms were needed, and that he would advocate early parliamentary elections to ease the current situation. Looking ahead, Babanov suggested the creation of an independent television station -- possibly with financial assistance from the U.S. -- to broadcast objective information throughout the country.
END SUMMARY.

INSTABILITY REMAINS AN UNFORTUNATE REALITY

¶2. (C) MP Omurbek Babanov told SCA DAS Evan Feigenbaum April 17 that the current political situation remains unstable, and that the president has done little to ease the tensions. Babanov said that he personally advised President Bakiyev to move ahead with reforms, nominate judges for the Constitutional Court, and refrain from using force against the opposition, noting that more people would join Kulov's ranks if there were attacks against opposition supporters. Babanov said that Bakiyev had failed to act on his suggestions, however, because he did not see the need following the low turnout at the opposition's demonstrations over the past week. Babanov thought Bakiyev could still stabilize the situation by moving ahead on reforms or calling for early presidential elections -- and doing so while not under pressure from opposition demonstrators would actually be a more effective move. Babanov felt that there needed to

be a new constitution adopted before any elections to ensure that the new president did not have the same "overarching powers" that Bakiyev has now.

¶13. (C) Babanov said that Bakiyev had exacerbated regional divides by using regional alliances for his own political gain. The president's rhetoric had also made the situation worse, creating a no-win situation for parliamentarians who were forced to answer their constituents' concerns.

Referring to a scuffle that broke out in parliament on April 17 between MPs from the north and south, Babanov said that the country was beginning to divide itself in two.

Additionally, constituents were losing confidence in their parliamentary representatives, said Babanov, making it more reasonable to call for early parliamentary elections.

Holding new elections would also "cleanse" the Jogorku Kenesh of Akayev-era MPs, and instill more confidence in parliament.

Babanov went on to estimate that sixty percent of the population believed clashes between the north and south are possible, and that Bakiyev-led provocations against the opposition were likely. According to Babanov, Kyrgyz society was "at the edge of war," which is why it was important to resolve the current crisis quickly.

INDEPENDENT TV: A TOOL FOR STABILITY

¶14. (C) Babanov suggested the creation of an independent television network, to broadcast objective information throughout Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia as a whole. Claiming that all TV stations currently in operation are somehow influenced by the government or other foreign sources, such as Russia, Babanov said that Kyrgyzstan needs a "Radio Liberty-like" station that could remain untouchable by domestic or foreign actors. Believing that state-owned

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broadcaster KTR would never be truly independent -- as the president would maintain control over the station's advisory council, after appointing its members -- Babanov argued that it would be advisable to seek Western partners, like the U.S. and EU, to avoid any domestic or Russian entanglements.

¶15. (C) He suggested that the USG -- either directly or indirectly through private business -- could provide financial assistance as Babanov attempts to purchase an operating license. If that was not possible, he suggested the U.S. provide content or work with the station on a project basis. Without Western involvement, Babanov feared that he would be vulnerable to government pressure. Comparing the venture to the USG-funded Freedom House Printing Press, Babanov said that independent TV would help promote democracy, by protecting the media from government-produced biases. In addition, he said that the station could also act as an instrument to hold the president at his word, making it more difficult for Bakiyev to walk back any of his promises by skewing the news in one direction or another. DAS Feigenbaum said that he would relay Babanov's idea to Washington for further consideration. (NOTE: When Babanov was a part owner of the NTS television station, he approached us for support in turning that station into a nationwide "public" television station. Babanov recently sold his share in NTS "under pressure." END NOTE.)

COMMENT

¶16. (C) At this point, there is not a lot going on in Ala-Too Square, and many observes think the opposition's street demonstration has fizzled. Nevertheless, emotions are still running high on both sides. Although Babanov was pessimistic that the sides could reach a resolution in the current environment, it is clear that the parties are carrying on stepped-up negotiations behind closed doors.

¶17. (U) This cable has been cleared by DAS Evan Feigenbaum.

YOVANOVITCH